History of Anthropology Newsletter

Volume 6
Issue 2 *1979*

Article 4

1-1-1979

Julian Steward's Defense of Non-Academic Anthropology (1946)

Joseph Hanc

Reisner, Mrs. George	10	1905-1912
Richardson, Rufus B. (archeology of Greece)	5	1899-1901
Sharp, Joseph H. (paintings of Indians)	11	1907-1913
Stevenson, Sara Yorke (re: William Pepper, Univ. of Pennsylvania and American Exploration Society)	54	1896-1914
Uhle, Max (Peruvian Expedition, American Exploration Society)	14	1900-1905
Warren, Minton (American School of Classical Studies, Rome)	2	1895-1896

FOOTNOTES TO THE HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY

JULIAN STEWARD'S DEFENSE OF NON-ACADEMIC ANTHROPOLOGY (1946)

Joseph Hanc
University of Chicago

Although the reorganization of the American Anthropological Association in 1946 has been seen simply as the restructuring of a scholarly society along more professional lines, it had implications for anthropology's extra-disciplinary relations (Stocking, 1976). Julian H. Steward, chairman of the AAA Committee on Reorganization, is generally recognized as the principle author of that Committee's recommendations and in the letter reproduced below he addresses a defense of these institutional changes to Alfred L. Kroeber, his old teacher. As it explicitly links reorganization to Steward's interpretation of "fundamental trends" of anthropology "in relation to the world," this letter contributes significantly to our understanding of this event.

World War II had brought an unprecedented flow of federal support to science, and the immediate postwar years saw the scientific community attempt to establish comparable support on a permanent peacetime basis through the establishment of a National Research Foundation (legislative forerunner of the National Science Foundation). From this the social sciences were initially excluded by the dominant physical sciences. Obliged to protest anthropology's status as a science, some members of the discipline saw the humanistic, historical and reformist orientations represented by Redfield, Kidder and Mead as a genuine liability. Steward had worked privately "to give anthropology a respected place as a basic research science with respect to the National Research Foundation"; the institutional changes he authored allowed anthropology more confidently to claim its support. Questioning the scientific merit of non-university research in general and of government research in particular, Kroeber sent a separate letter for Steward along with his response to the Committee on Reorganization's request for comments. Presumably intending to distinguish scientifically-motived initiatives from those prompted by the mere presence of research opportunities, he characterized the reorganization effort as "mean-notived." As a native Washingtonian with a family history of federal service, Steward was clearly unembarrassed by his government connections. Protesting his own disinterestedness and documenting job openings in government, he drafted a response arguing that reorganization would benefit the entire discipline. Nevertheless, the ultimate justifi-

cation of his plan to "mobilize anthropology" did lie in the opportunities it might take advantage of. Perhaps feeling that a defense based ultimately on "bacon brought home" would not satisfy his mentor, Steward never mailed his letter. Undated and without a closing, it was placed in Steward's "Personal Correspondence" folder, rather than with the other reorganization materials (which are now at the National Anthropological Archives in Washington, D.C.). It may now be found in Box 13 of the Julian H. Steward papers at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Archives (for details and general references see Hanc 1979). I would like to thank Mrs. Jane C. Steward, now of Waikiki, for permission to publish this letter.

[ca. August 1946]

Dear Kroeber:

Thanks for your very personal letter, and for the other about the reorganization of anthropology, which I have not yet answered. You seem to look at me askance, which I can well understand. When I wrote that I long for the simpler research and teaching niche, I stated a personal preference, not a conviction about fundamental trends of our science in relation to the world. As a matter of fact, my real trouble is that I am doing too much: a major research job in the Handbook [of South American Indians, BAE Bulletin 143] (my own and that of others); a major promotional and research planning job in the Institute; a fair teaching job, in that I not only spend a vast amount of time on the problems of my own personnel but actually devote 5 to 10 hours a week to odds and ends of other peoples' students who drift through; and a large number of miscellaneous chores on behalf of the profession because I happen to be a guy with a conscience about taking advantage of opportunities and with a little too much imagination to stop seeing opportunities. I may be destined for an occlusion; probably I'll get ulcers first, except that I can cut down on this too-full life, when the Handbook is finished, and I probably shall.

I give you this about myself partly because I know your sympathetic interest, partly to explain these "mean-motived" situations and to ask how one could do otherwise. A bunch of scholars running a journal and handing out honors have to be financed. The better they succeed in their scholastic niches, the greater the need for an outlet for their students. I figure that if anthropology is going to be effective, it should be brought into all possible situations. You who have taught it these many years have done such a good job that it is in far wider demand than anyone could have dreamed 10 or 15 years ago. And yet, people now rising to administrative positions who know enough about it to want it in research and other jobs are continually turned back because they cannot find anyone who can help them put it over. Naturally, I see the situation from the point of view of the Federal Government. It happens that the government has

become an important employer, whatever one feels about the prop(r)iety of the fact. But I daresay that the federal recognition of anthropology extends also to state and private spheres.

Why then mobilize anthropology? If my vindication is proportionate to the amount of bacon brought home, let me sketch a few developments that have already taken place: situations where I feel I have already brought the bacon home without any real help from the profession, but could have done an infinitely better job with help, and at less expense to my digestion. First, the Valley Authority archeology. A year ago last December it occurred to me that 9/10 of the best arch(a)eology in the U.S. would be lost forever if something were not done. Where was the AAA or the SAA [Society for American Archaeology]? The one had not the tradition of looking ahead; the other was dependent on amateurs who had to be kept out of the projects, lest we have a repetition of WPA [Works Progress Administration]. First, I prodded the SI [Smithsonian Institution], but it was dead; then the Basic Needs Committee of the NRC, but it couldn't do the necessary lobbying. Withal, it took me five months of prodding and manouevering to set up a Committee that could act: it finally covered the SAA, the ACLS [American Council of Learned Societies], the AAA and the SI. The SI being involved, I had to fade from the picture. Nonetheless, the net result is that the Committee is about to get some $100,000 for this arch(a)eology for next year, with further sums in the future. The Valley Authority archaeology is of no particular moment to me, and by now no one even identifies me with it, except the Committee members. Perhaps I should have tended my own knitting. But what does one do when an opportunity arises? Had there been a mobilized profession to which I could have referred it-- a profession organized to take responsibility on behalf of the profession, rather than on behalf of individuals, as at present--I would have had little trouble. In retrospect, now that the situation is well under control, I know that many valleys will be flooded before the material is dug precisely because of that five months delay in getting started. In such situations, my inclination is to be the cloistered scholar, and that is why I would like to get into a more routine life.

I could also cite you the work I went to last summer to give anthropology a respected place as a basic research science with respect to the National Research Foundation bill, but had to give it up because it was one more job than I could carry. I groped for support from the profession, but it was not there. I could cite the requests from the State Department's Office of the Geographer [for] anthropological help, from every division of Agriculture for assistance in introducing anthropologists and their techniques, from State and War in helping develop anthropology as the chore of regional training for their foreign personnel, and from the Pan-American Institute of Geography and History that wants to make a major place for anthropology, not only because of its basic research value but because it recognizes anthropology's value respecting its immediate project which is that of working toward the 1950 census. I might even cite the Institute of Social Anthropology, which I created with my bare

hands, despite the decadence of the SI and without the least help from the profession, though I sought it repeatedly.

Naturally, I speak of government situations, for these are the ones I know. If anthropology in the future had only to deal with government, there would still be a place for a professional group that could relieve individuals like myself from these chores. But I feel quite certain that one cannot distinguish government from the rest of the country. What I am pleading for is a professional basis for our future; a group that can choose its own representatives and charge them with the responsibility of looking ahead, planning, and working on behalf of their colleagues rather than on their own behalf. I think I have not lost my perspective so much as you may believe. I am protesting the archaic organization that elects presidents like Redfield, who doesn(')t attend meetings, like Kidder, who doesn't give a damn because he has security in his own corner, and like Cooper, who protests democracy but won't give up one little bit of power because he doesn(')t really trust younger men. I am protesting the kind of reaction we got from New Mexico, which said, "Why bother us with this nonsense? We have good jobs and don't need to worry. Besides, we think government anthropology stinks," and to which I had to reply, "If you are not interested in helping develop jobs to get your students employment, don't you think you had better tell them that before they become anthropology majors?" I am protesting the kind of personal promotion that anthropology, like everything else in this life, is so easily given to, exemplified by Margaret Mead and certain others, who were all with us at first, trying to use this movement as a device to develop their own special interests. You would probably call the last "pressure groups." Of course they are. It would be very naive to suppose that anthropology does not have its pressure groups. The sole difference between the existing situation and what I am trying to achieve for the profession is to iron out the pressure groups to a slight extent and to line up these groups on behalf of common interest.

As the situation now stands, we have a certain support beyond that which individual institutions can give their own. You know quite well that that support is subject to existing pressure groups. If I could spend an evening with you I would like to relate what I have picked up about the institutions that have come to dominate the SSRC, the Rockefeller, the Viking Fund, the Indian Office, and the various other government agencies; the morbid sense of enmity and competition between Linton and Chicago, between Yale and Columbia, etc. If our proposal is so ill-advised that it will actually enhance these pressure groups and enmities, we are all glad to discuss particulars. At worst, any new organization of anthropologists will not create pressure groups; it will merely give them expression. At best, it will cut across such groups and provide a means whereby the youngsters --not those in power with too much to lose--can elect, without being told by a committee whom to elect and without embarrassment, those whom they trust.

You undoubtedly see in this letter the pattern of the government. Naturally, I recognize that I look at the situation from this point of

> view. Still, I can't believe that the government pattern is wholly out of step with private and local patterns. Least of all am I willing to concede that motives must be mean. In that case, we would have to say that the opponents are not better motived than the proponents.
>
> This letter has undoubtedly assigned me to a certain role: that of being a terrific busy-body, who, living in Washington, can't help but get mixed up in all sorts of things. Very true, and it has taken a certain toll. But practically every day I am faced with the question of whether I shall say, "To hell with it," at the expense, I can conservatively say for the past year, of about $300,000 for anthropological work or jobs for anthropologists, or cry out for help from the profession. Our estimed colleagues work at these situations privately, for themselves or their institutions. I think the Valley Authority example exonerates me from such motives. I simply want help that does not come from special pressure groups. If I am on the wrong track, I would like to know in very specific terms how you answer these problems, how you get these jobs done, and how you avoid pressure groups, be they local or otherwise, without selling out to those which exist.

At this point in time anthropology's major generational cleavage concerned its practical value. For historically-minded elders this lay in criticism of current popular assumption, while the more scientific junior generation felt anthropology had something more directly useful to offer. Steward assumed that anthropology could be "effective," though he in fact would have restricted it to an advisory role. By taking nominations out of committee and opening them to the fellows of the Association, he hoped to enable "the youngsters" to elect "those whom they please," and give control of the AAA to a generation eager to put anthropology to work.

Steward was clearly unembarrassed by his unalloyed attention to jobs and funds. Measured against an ideal of scientific disinterestedness this may seem mean-motived indeed, but in appraising this letter it should be recognized that such candid concern was quite common in the immediate postwar years. The proposed NSF called up a prospect of unprecedented progress and congressional attempts to make it politically "responsive"(rather than "insular") were perceived as threats to science itself (Kevles 1977). Organized science's political interests were conflated with the advancement of science and many scientists became open and active partisans. In this context Steward's preoccupation with support for anthropology seems neither exceptional nor excessive.

Although the vigorous non-academic anthropology envisioned by Steward did not materialize, the federal support he hoped for eventually did. True, the great expansion of academic opportunity in the 1950s submerged anthropologists' status as professionals in their identity as scholars (Steward eventually found his own scholastic niche in rural central Illinois). Anthropological research, however, was largely sustained by an interrelated system of government, universities and organized science into which anthropologists (and other social scientists) were integrated as professionals. Recently, events external to anthropology have

prompted criticism of this relationship. Professionalism per se, however, has not been attacked, and professional identity may be strengthened as a new crisis in jobs leads to a reconsideration of the non-academic uses of anthropology.

From this perspective, Steward's concerns in pushing the reorganization of the Association seems much more significant than perhaps they did to Kroeber.

Hanc, Joseph Robert. 1979. "The Julian H. Steward Papers," History of Anthropology Newsletter 4 (1), pp. 3-6.

Kevles, Daniel J. 1977. "The National Science Foundation and the Debate over Postwar Research Policy: A Political Interpretation of Science - The Endless Frontier," Isis 68 (241), pp. 1-24.

Lyons, Gene M. 1969. The Uneasy Partnership: Social Science and the Federal Government in the Twentieth Century, Russell Sage Foundation, New York.

Stocking, George W. 1976. "Ideas and Institutions in American Anthropology: Toward a History of the Interwar Period," in George W. Stocking (ed.), Selected Papers from the American Anthropologist 1921-1945, American Anthropological Association, Washington, D.C.

CLIO'S FANCY: DOCUMENTS TO PIQUE THE HISTORICAL IMAGINATION

"THE INTENSIVE STUDY OF LIMITED AREAS"--TOWARD AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CONTEXT FOR THE MALINOWSKIAN INNOVATION

Although American anthropologists might contest the honor, in favor of Boas or Cushing, the founding of the modern fieldwork tradition in anthropology is still--despite the shocked reaction to his diaries--usually attributed to Bronislaw Malinowski. True, there is general recognition that Alfred Cort Haddon's Torres Straits Expedition and Williams Rivers' "genealogical method" had previously established an international reputation for "the Cambridge School" of anthropology. However, the ethnographic context of Malinowski's innovation has not been investigated in detail. As the following draft of a testimonial letter by Haddon in 1908 suggests, Malinowski's work in the Trobriand Islands between 1915 and 1918 was as much the culmination of a Torres Straits ethnographic tradition as it was the starting point of a modern functionalist one. (The original is in the Haddon papers in the Cambridge University Library and is reproduced with the permission of Haddon's son, Ernest.)

The investigation of the uncivilized races is now a matter of urgent necessity, owing to their contact with Europeans and others, which results either in their extermination or in the modification of